

# STUDENTS IN SERVICE



## A Strategy for Learning



Tennessee Department of Education  
Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service

[www.volunteertennessee.net](http://www.volunteertennessee.net)

Dear Friends:

Tennessee has made great strides to increase student achievement and reduce dropout rates, yet there is still much that can be done to improve educational opportunities for our students. Service-learning, a teaching method that achieves classroom objectives through hands-on volunteer service, is a powerful tool to reconnect with at-risk students and encourage them to remain in school. Service-learning enables them to see that they can make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of others.

Through this publication, I am very pleased to present new evaluation information about service-learning and its outcomes for our own students during the recent implementation of the Community Service for Suspended and Expelled Students (CSSES) grant. The Department of Education is committed to sharing innovative ideas and best practices that have worked in classrooms, schools, and communities like yours. I think you will find tangible information that can be easily replicated in even more classrooms across the state.

Thank you for taking the time to read this important publication. If service-learning is not currently in your toolkit, I hope you will consider its outcomes and possibilities. It is a program that truly makes a difference by giving something back to our communities and our state.

Sincerely,



Lana Seivers  
Commissioner  
Tennessee Department of Education





## Tennessee educators should be proud.

Students' test scores (TCAP, Gateway, SAT, ACT) continue to rise; the proportion of Tennessee students aged 18-24 going to college has increased 34 percent in the last decade; and the number of teachers receiving certification from the prestigious National Board of Professional Teaching Standards has increased nearly four-fold since 2000. What's more, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education ranks Tennessee as one of the top three states in gains made over the last decade in preparing students for college.<sup>1</sup>

And, while Tennessee has increased the graduation rate among high school students over the last few years (currently around 76 percent), the state still ranks 30th in the nation<sup>2</sup>, illuminating dropout prevention as

<sup>1</sup>[www.nea.org/goodnews/tn01.html](http://www.nea.org/goodnews/tn01.html)

<sup>2</sup>2005 Kids Count report, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation

one of the most persistent and difficult issues we face. We have made great strides keeping students in school, and we must keep trying new strategies to continue to improve.

More than ever before, educators have to perform a sort of balancing act – raising the bar for students academically while keeping more of them engaged, focused, and in school. It's a feat that cannot be accomplished alone. We know that, indeed, *it takes a village to raise a child*. We also know that school officials need new ideas that work.



So, what happens, then, when we engage the child in helping to make the village better?

## NEW IDEAS AT WORK

In response to President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service (see inset box) implemented two grant programs, "Learn and Serve America" (LSA) and "Community Services for Suspended and Expelled Students" (CSSES), in 2003 to address the needs of at-risk youth in the areas of academic achievement, character development, and risk reduction. Participants in the CSSES program included especially hard-to-reach students who were removed from their regular educational setting, were expelled or were remanded to an alternative school setting.

By engaging at-risk students in structured community service, we offered them a positive learning experience, rather than a punitive one. We gave them a sense of purpose to help "make the village better," so to speak, by meeting genuine needs in the school or

community that have significant consequences for themselves and others. As a result, students gained greater classroom knowledge and valuable life skills along the way.

*The Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service is a 25-member bi-partisan board appointed by the Governor. Its mission is to advance national and community service and volunteerism as a means of community problem-solving in Tennessee through the administration of programs like AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America.*

This brochure highlights the positive outcomes of the LSA and CSSES initiatives and provides research-based information that demonstrates service-learning as an effective, easy-to-implement methodology to reach even more at-risk students throughout the state.

## WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning is a teaching approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Teachers facilitate learning by creating opportunities for students to understand and analyze their service experiences in the context of their class work.

Current research shows that service-learning enhances motivation to learn and is linked to

increased attendance and reduced drop-out rates. And while addressing these critical educational concerns, service-learning helps tackle other community problems related to the environment and other people in need. <sup>3</sup>

In 2000, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a long-time supporter of service-learning, appointed a National Commission on Service-Learning. The Commission, co-sponsored by the John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy and chaired by former U.S. Senator John Glenn, spent a year studying the state of service-learning in the nation's schools. The Commission's findings, included below, took account of a study of K-12 school-based programs conducted between 1994 and 1997

*"My experience today made me feel wanted because I helped other people."*

*– student, Anderson Co., TN*

<sup>3</sup>Fiske, Edward B., et al, *Learning In Deed*, the National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002

<sup>4</sup>*Students in Service to America*, Corporation for National and Community Service, 2002 (reprinted with permission)



to evaluate service-learning programs. The following is a summary of the Commission's findings and other studies on potential service-learning effects <sup>4</sup>:

- **Increased student engagement**

Students who participate in high quality service-learning programs can become more active learners. Service-learning allows students to make the critical connection between the knowledge they are acquiring in the classroom and its use in the real world. Through service-learning, students are taught to think



critically, make key decisions, interact with others, and provide service that makes a difference both to themselves



and also to the community. As a result, their school attendance and motivation to learn can increase.

- **Improved academic achievement**

When teachers explicitly tie service activities to academic standards and learning objectives, students can show gains on measures of academic achievement, including standardized tests. Service-learning that includes environmental activities, for example, can help students apply math skills (e.g.,

measurement and problem-solving) and science skills (e.g. prediction and knowledge of botany), if they are explicitly woven into the experience.

- **Improved thinking skills**

Service-learning helps students improve their ability to analyze complex tasks, draw inferences from data, solve new problems, and make decisions. The degree to which improvements occur in these “higher order thinking skills” can depend on how well teachers get students to talk about and understand the service activities they are performing.

- **Improved character**

Service-learning promotes responsibility, trustworthiness, and caring for others. Through service projects, students can learn not to let each other down or to disappoint those being served. Young people who participate in service-learning are the students who acquire an ethic of service, volunteer more frequently, and say they plan to continue to volunteer as they get older.

- **Improved social behavior**

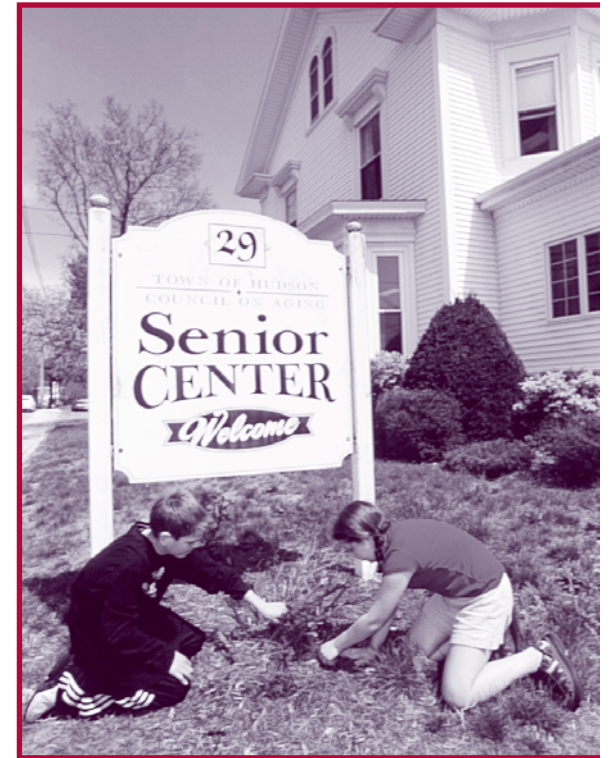
Young people who are active in service programs are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. For many young people, service-learning provides a venue in which they can be more successful than they have been in more traditional classroom settings. Service and service-learning can also reinforce the kinds of social behaviors that are crucial for success in the workforce.

- **Stronger ties to schools, communities, and society**

Service-learning can give students a sense of belonging to and responsibility for their communities. For example, through service projects, young people often come to believe that they can make a difference in their schools, communities, and society. Some studies have

*“(We’ve) experienced fewer juvenile court petitions, fewer suspensions, and a more positive school environment.”*

*– teacher, Charlotte, TN*



established a strong connection between this sense of efficacy and academic achievement, as well as greater concern for personal health and well-being.

- **Exposure to new careers**

Through service-learning, many students come into contact with adults in careers



that would otherwise remain hidden to them. For example, students may meet social workers, scientists, park rangers, government workers, health workers, and others who work in community agencies. By assisting them and seeing how schoolwork relates to what they do,

students can acquire higher or more varied career or job aspirations, along with a more realistic understanding of what is necessary to attain.

- **Positive school environments**

Where service-learning is practiced school-wide, program experience shows that teachers can feel reinvigorated, dialogue on teaching and learning can be stimulated, and the school climate can improve. In fact, many teachers become advocates for incorporating more service into the curriculum. Service programs have also been associated with reduced negative student behaviors and disciplinary referrals, as well as drop-out rates.

- **Stronger community groups**

When young people form early connections with community groups through service activities, the groups themselves are often the beneficiaries. Young people can infuse a charity or civic group with energy and inspiration; become members of the volunteer force, staff, or board; help build awareness of

*“Students became aware that their lives held value in the project’s goal of helping others. One student was able to gain paid employment due to her experience.”*

– teacher, Cookeville, TN

the group’s mission throughout the community; and help an organization garner positive press and media attention.

- **Increased community support for schools**

Community members who work with the young people engaged in service activities frequently say they come to view youth differently, seeing them as assets who contribute to the community in positive ways. Public support for schools can grow as a result of student involvement in community activities.

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning techniques are easy to incorporate into an existing curriculum. Instead of being an extra hurdle for teachers and administrators to jump, service-learning

is simply another way for them to reach already established classroom objectives.

The Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service provides innovative, two-day service-learning trainings for teachers throughout the year and can be a valuable resource in helping students increase performance. Utilizing the award-winning Lions-Quest *Skills for Action* program, teachers access comprehensive materials that prepare them to immediately implement a new strategy into their schools. Their students benefit by learning teamwork, leadership, and pro-social skills, as well as drug and alcohol





prevention. More than 1,000 Tennessee teachers have been trained and are eligible to infuse service-learning into subject area learning or deliver Course Code 9395 “Success Skills Through Service-Learning” for high school credit. Many partner with local Tennessee Lions Clubs for service, demonstration, and resources.

*Resources for hosting or participating in service-learning trainings can be found at the end of this publication.*

## PROVEN SUCCESS IN TENNESSEE

More than 3,000 at-risk youth representing 40 Tennessee public schools (mainly in grades 9-12) participated in the LSA and CSSES grants during school years 2003-2005. The outcomes, summarized here, demonstrate the dramatic effect that service-learning had on their lives. It is our hope that you will consider these outcomes as real possibilities in every school throughout our state.

Educators from the sub-grantee schools were trained in service-learning with funds provided by these grants, and most used Lions-Quest’s

*Skills for Action* curriculum to support the learning activities they planned with students. Teachers then guided students, combining academic content and life skills as they planned community service activities. Using the four elements of service-learning



pedagogical cycle (planning, action, reflection, and demonstration), teachers and students had opportunities to apply classroom knowledge of real-world applications.

### How the sub-grantees were selected

*Local Tennessee school districts applied and were selected for the LSA project funded through a grant to the Tennessee Department of Education from the Corporation for National and Community Service. Most LSA project designs included stand-alone service-learning classes.*

*Sub-grants for the CSSES initiative were awarded by the Tennessee Department of Education as part of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program. Sub-grantees were selected after an open bidding process that included participants from alternative public schools, school districts who wished to open a program for suspended or expelled youth, and nonprofit agencies who could work collaboratively with schools and serve suspended or expelled youth.*

*In this way, the two grants created different designs to measure the efficacy of service-learning. Successful bidders for the CSSES program were trained in concepts of service-learning in the same way as the LSA school-based staff. Key support for training has come from Tennessee Lions Clubs and Lions Clubs International Foundation.*

Some programs collected information from the student, parent/caregiver, and key teachers to identify the students’ academic challenges. For example, many students and their teachers said that they needed help on verbal communication skills. The CSSES project

coordinator at that site would then brainstorm with the student about what community needs could be met while enhancing peer-to-peer communication, as well as having that student practice verbal communication with adults.

The overall desired outcomes of the LSA and CSSES programs included the following:

- students would engage in service projects that met genuine community needs;
- students would learn new skills, think critically, and try on new roles in a supportive environment;

*“Students who came in on a lower reading level did not want to be involved in reading activities with pre-school children, but, by the end, they were eager to read and help.”*

*– teacher, Chattanooga, TN*

- students would improve attendance;
- students would improve behavior;

- students would have opportunities to develop values of responsibility, teamwork, self-respect and a positive work ethic; and



- students would successfully return to their regular educational program.

## OUTCOMES MADE REAL

Community involvement varied from site to site. Service was often simple, sometimes even taking place on campus. The difference between community service and service-learning was the focus on learning goals and student reflection.

In Benton County, students teamed with the local animal shelter to provide services for the animals' well-being. Daily, students cleaned cages, watered and fed the animals, assisted with pick-up and veterinary trips, and also worked with socialization (leash walking, play, tricks) to help make them more desirable for adoption. The project coordinator related the service to coursework in math, science, and English.

The students were involved in choosing the project by researching various community needs and voting on which one to select. They worked with the shelter manager to determine what they could contribute. Of the 15 students involved in this project, the project coordinator reported that they all "displayed the ability to

work as a group, take feedback from other students, and showed improved study habits and skills."

Of one student in particular, the coordinator said, "J has never had any school success stories, as he would tell you, but when we started the actual project, something hidden in him appeared. Always having been a follower, he seemed to lead our small group and others really looked to him for direction. Even though school is out, J continues to volunteer with the shelter. He has even decided to pursue working with animals as a career."

In Humphreys County, students shared a number of duties, from maintaining the school's athletic fields to environmental projects at the local state park. Prior to participation in service-learning, teachers related student expulsion and suspension to high absenteeism and confrontational behavior. As a result of the project, teachers



indicated a much lower absentee rate among these students, as well as an increase in overall enthusiasm. The students were so excited about their accomplishments that they made exceptional presentations to the Exchange Club and the Humphreys County Chamber of Commerce.

One student wrote of his own personal experience:

"I feel fortunate to have been able to have this program as a consequence for my actions as opposed to a more severe punishment. This program has helped me to realize the problems I have, and my teacher has given me valuable advice concerning the important decisions I will be confronted with in the future. While being isolated from the rest of the student body, I have been able to complete my assignments with the help of my teacher's caring determination. I have also been able to continue to work on what is really important to my future. I have gained a great appreciation for this program and hope



that others who find themselves in situations similar to mine would have the privilege to go through this program.”

In Lawrence County, suspended students spent three to ten days in different settings, including a nursing home, food bank, clothing drive, and pre-school. Students read to pre-schoolers and to the elderly, sorted and boxed food,



and completed many other tasks, while utilizing problem-solving, reading and math skills.

“One student had experienced academic failure, a dysfunctional home, as well as drug and alcohol use,” a teacher reported. “She was overwhelmed at how the service-learning staff and volunteers accepted and encouraged her, and understood that she could live differently from the way she had. She’s truly changed!”

## TENNESSEE EVALUATION RESULTS

These success stories are just the beginning. **The major findings for both the LSA and CSSES grant programs were compiled and evaluated by Molly Laird, PhD, lead investigator for The Evaluation Team based in Ohio. They follow below:**

- Suspended students in service-learning programs reduced their school absences by 52 percent (8.97 to 4.33 days) during the intervention period.
- Suspended and expelled students who were in long-term service-learning

programs (from two weeks to a whole semester) increased their grade point average by .34. Students at three of the alternative school sites improved as much as a whole letter grade in performance.

- Suspended students enrolled in the long-term service-learning programs accumulated an average of 2.5 suspensions before they were offered an alternative program and only .41 suspensions during the intervention.
- Suspended and expelled students showed dramatic attitude changes. They felt like they were part of the community; they felt that they could communicate with adults and present ideas; they could control their anger; they gained confidence about their skills; and they knew they could provide helpful service to others.
- All at-risk students showed dramatic improvement in attitudes related to school connectedness. They liked school and school-related activities; they felt safe and knew that teachers cared about them; they had friends at school; and they joined more clubs and organizations.

They also increased in their attitudes about being leaders.

- There were modest declines reported in students’ alcohol use at eight sub-grantee sites during the intervention period.

## MORE POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Here are a few more valuable comments from teachers, students, and community partners:

“One student was reluctantly placed (to work) in a nursing home. The placement was so successful that she was given a summer job, certified nursing assistant training, and offered a scholarship for LPN training upon graduation from high school.”

– teacher, Lawrence Co., TN

“This program has taught me several things. One of them is to be more responsible in doing my homework because grades are important if you plan on doing something with your life.”

– student, Waverly, TN

“I think this is a good program for people to be in. It shows that they can make a difference in class and in the community. You can tell that people really like you being here and that they enjoy your help.”

– student, Waverly, TN

“(This) program enables us to provide more options than violating juveniles’ probation for misconduct at school. In return, they gain work ethics in the community, and schoolwork is maintained, allowing juveniles to keep up with their academics. This program provides Juvenile Court with further resources for juveniles in our county, essentially keeping children out of state custody.”

– juvenile court official, McMinn Co., TN

“Students have more self-esteem; discipline referrals decreased; and there were no physical fights for the remainder of the year. Our students were excited about attending college and going on more college tours.”

– teacher, Memphis, TN

“Students often do not have the knowledge necessary to plan service activities or the skills to actually do the activities. To resolve this, students learned about existing problems and what is necessary to fix them. Our students also acquired new skills through the actual service component. Some of the ‘hard-core’ offenders have been the most creative with solutions to solving problems and are also the hardest workers.”

– teacher, Hancock Co., TN

“Discipline is a must for these students in order for them to understand the necessity for adhering to rules and regulations throughout their lives. This program gives them the opportunity to pick their heads up, learn from their mistakes, and experience the importance of being a productive member of the community.”

– parks and recreation official, Martin, TN

## Grant Program Participants

The following is a list of sub-grantees who participated in the CSSES and LSA grant initiatives from 2003 to 2005. We are grateful for their dedication to their students and the necessary findings they uncovered along the way.

### *Community Services for Suspended and Expelled Students Sub-grantees*

#### Anderson County Schools

Roger Robinson, grant coordinator  
(865) 457 – 7462

#### Benton County Schools

Sheila Barnes, grant coordinator  
(731) 584 – 1455

#### Cocke County Schools

Love Henderson, grant coordinator  
(423) 625 – 9615

#### Dickson County Schools

John Gunn, grant coordinator  
(615) 740 – 6070

#### Hamilton County Schools

Anne McGintis, grant coordinator  
(423) 209 – 8595

#### Humphreys County Board of Education

Kristi Brown, grant coordinator  
(931) 296 – 2568

#### South Highland Learning Center (Jackson)

Terry Robinson, grant coordinator  
(731) 422 – 1142

#### Kingsport City Schools

Christy Hopkins-Myers, grant coordinator  
(423) 878 – 2185

#### Lawrence County Schools

Dani Johnson, grant coordinator  
(931) 762 – 3581

#### Lenoir City Schools

Janet I. McGee, grant coordinator  
(865) 988 – 2041

#### Maury County Schools

Janet Hanvy, grant coordinator  
(931) 381 – 1474

**McMinn County Schools**

Wayne Ingram, grant coordinator  
(423) 746 – 4581

**Memphis City Schools**

Joris Ray, grant coordinator  
(901) 529 – 8289

**Polk County Schools**

Sandra Gilder, grant coordinator  
(423) 338 – 3105

**Putnam County Schools**

Kathleen Airhart, grant coordinator  
(931) 526 – 9777

**Union County Schools**

Mary Cianci, grant coordinator  
(865) 992 – 7048

**Weakley County Alternative School**

Joyce Hale, grant coordinator  
(731) 364 – 3979

**Williamson County Government/Juvenile Services**

Judy Carré Strickland, grant coordinator  
(615) 790 – 5810

**Boys and Girls Club of the Tennessee Valley**

(Knoxville)  
Kelly Drummond, grant coordinator  
(865) 544 – 3825

**Clinch Powell Educational Cooperative**

(Sneedville)  
Jack Mullins, grant coordinator  
(423) 733 – 4785

**Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority**

(Morristown)  
Karen McMahan, grant coordinator  
(423) 587 – 4500

**United Way of Anderson County**

Kimberly Whitman, grant coordinator  
(865) 483 – 8431

***Learn and Serve America Sub-grantees***

**Carter County Schools**

David Hughes, project coordinator  
(423) 547 – 8310

**Dickson County Schools**

John Gunn, grant coordinator  
(615) 740 – 6070

**Haywood County Schools**

Shaunda Brittain, grant coordinator  
(731) 772 – 4221

**Humphreys County Board of Education**

Kristi Brown, grant coordinator  
(931) 296 – 2568

**Johnson City Schools**

Glenda McCracken, grant coordinator  
(423) 928 – 0522

**Knox County Schools**

Christy Jo Seals, grant coordinator  
(865) 594 – 1133

**Memphis City Schools**

Jennifer Lindsey, grant coordinator  
(901) 775 – 7510

**Polk County Board of Education**

Jean Bramlett, grant coordinator  
(423) 338 – 4506

**Van Buren County Board of Education**

Cordell Crawford, grant coordinator  
(931) 946 – 2442

**Warren County Schools**

Patti W. Clarke, grant coordinator  
(931) 507 – 5180



## CONCLUSION AND RESOURCES FOR NEXT STEPS

The Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service both affirm that service-learning can make a difference in the lives of any student, particularly those who have been disengaged from school life and have been historically difficult to reach. We encourage educators all across the state to explore this methodology and discover first-hand the vital ramifications of this strategy. ***If the village is to raise the child, let the child know how important he is to the village.***

To obtain more information on service-learning or Lions-Quest trainings in Tennessee or to subscribe to *Clues and News*, a bi-monthly electronic service-learning newsletter, contact:

Tennessee Commission on National and Community Service  
Meredith Freeman, Learn & Serve Program Officer  
12th Floor, William R. Snodgrass Tennessee Tower  
312 8th Avenue North  
Nashville, TN 37243-1700  
(615) 741-9242  
toll free (800) 404-8183  
fax (615) 532-6950  
[meredith.freeman@state.tn.us](mailto:meredith.freeman@state.tn.us)  
[www.volunteertennessee.net](http://www.volunteertennessee.net)

For more information on school-based grants, contact:

School Safety and Learning Support Programs  
Tennessee Department of Education  
5th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower  
710 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, TN 37243  
(615) 741-3248  
[www.tennessee.gov/education/sp/sp-drugs](http://www.tennessee.gov/education/sp/sp-drugs)

For more information on Lions-Quest curricula, contact:

Lions-Quest International  
P.O. Box 304  
Annapolis Junction, MD 20701  
(800) 446-2700  
[www.lions-quest.org](http://www.lions-quest.org)

For more information on service-learning, please visit:

[www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)  
[www.learnandserve.org](http://www.learnandserve.org)  
[www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)  
[www.service-learningpartnership.org](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org)

For more information on Presidential Freedom Scholarships available to students who volunteer in their communities, please visit:

[www.nationalservice.gov/scholarships](http://www.nationalservice.gov/scholarships)

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